

## Q&A - A Short Guide to Fasting

Bulūgh ul-Marām as a Q&A - Sh. Sālih al-Fawzān حفظه الله تعالى

### Q/ What does "Sawm" or "Siyām" mean linguistically?

A/ To withhold & abstain from something. A person may withhold from talking and so be "fasting in speech".

### Q/ What does "Sawm" or "Siyām" mean in the Islamic sense?

A/ To abstain - with an intention - from the mufattirāt (all that which breaks and/or impacts upon the fast from eating, drinking, intercourse, backbiting, lying etc...) from the true dawn to sunset.

### Q/ If a person did not coincidentally eat or drink (or anything else that typically breaks the fast) the whole day is he considered to have fasted?

A/ He has fasted linguistically - but not in the Islamic sense, as that requires an intention.

### Q/ What is the wisdom in fasting?

A/ One of the main wisdoms is mentioned in the Qur'ān and that is to achieve piety.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

*O you who believe! Observing As-Saum (the fasting) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become Al-Muttaqun (the pious). (Sūrah al-Baqarah: 183).*

### Q/ Is it permissible to start fasting a day or two prior to Ramadān entering?

A/ It is impermissible due to the Hadīth in al-Bukhārī & Muslim, "Do not precede Ramadān by a day or two - except for a man who typically fasts then he can do so." (i.e. someone typically fasts Monday's & Thursday's and Ramadan falls on a Tuesday, so he can fast his Monday as usual).

### Q/ What is the day of doubt?

A/ We must understand 3 scenarios:

1 - On the 29th Sha'bān the new moon is sighted: the next day is Ramadan, no issue.

2 - On the 29th Sha'bān it's a clear night and there is no sighting: the next day is the 30th Sha'bān, no issue.

3 - On the 29th Sha'bān it's an unclear night due to dust, mist, rain, clouds etc and so it's not possible to achieve a clear viewing and determine whether the new moon is out or not, it may be out, it may not: the next day is known as the 'day of doubt'.

### **Q/ What should be done on the 'day of doubt'?**

**A/** It is not to be fasted, rather it is left as the 30th of Sha'bān, and Ramadān will begin the day after that upon completion of 30 days of Sha'bān. Several Hadīth in al-Bukhārī & Muslim affirm the command of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to complete 30 days of Sha'bān in that scenario, such as Hadīth of Abū Huraira, "...complete the number of days of Sha'bān as 30." (Al-Bukhārī 1909). This is what the majority of scholars have said.

### **Q/ How does the month of Ramadān enter?**

**A/** By sighting of the new moon or completion of 30 days of Sha'bān - and there is no 3rd method, scientific estimates & calculations of when the moon will appear or not are not an Islamic method prescribed by the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم.

### **Q/ How many witnesses are needed for the new moon?**

**A/** 1 witness is sufficient as evidenced by the narration ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما, "The people looked for the new moon, so I informed the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that I saw it, so he fasted and commanded the people to fast." (Abū Dāwūd 1909).

### **Q/ Does the witness have to be Muslim?**

**A/** Yes, as attested to in the Hadīth of ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما, whereby a bedouin informed the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that he spotted the new moon, but the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم did not know him so he asked him if he testifies to the shahāda first, he did, then his testimony was accepted. (Abū Dāwūd 2340 & others).

### **Q/ Does the intention for obligatory fasting like Ramadān need to be made the night before prior to Fajr time entering?**

**A/** Yes, as mentioned in the Hadith of Hafsa رضي الله عنها, "Whomsoever does not make his intention in the night before Fajr then there is no fasting for him."

**Q/ Is that also the case for optional fasts?**

**A/** No, optional fasts can be started during the day as evidenced in the Hadīth of ‘Āisha رضي الله عنها in Muslim 1154, that one day the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم came home and asked if there was any food, she told him no, so he صلى الله عليه وسلم made the intention to fast the rest of that day.

**Q/ Is it allowed to delay opening the fast by some time after sunset just to make sure?**

**A/** No, the fast should be opened immediately at Maghrib time and not delayed, in a Hadīth the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم mentioned that “the people will remain upon goodness as long as they are hasty in opening their fast (I.e. immediately on time).” (Al-Bukhārī 1957, Muslim 1098).

**Q/ Can I miss Suhūr?**

**A/** It should not be missed as the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم told us there is blessing within it, so even a small snack, water & dates etc is good, rather than missing it and missing the blessings.

**Q/ If I woke up late though accidentally and missed it, is my fast valid for that day?**

**A/** Yes it is still valid and you must fast the day regardless, Suhūr is not a condition upon validity of the fast.

**Q/ Does backbiting & lying etc affect my fast?**

**A/** Absolutely, such actions are considered figuratively breaking your fast i.e. even though your day will count you will lose significant reward, maybe have practically no reward left. Fasting is not just staying away from physical food & drink, but rather from affairs of evil in actions & speech.

**Q/ What was the hardest part of fasting for the Salaf?**

**A/** It certainly wasn't to stop eating & drinking as many might think these days! Rather they would say stopping eating & drinking is the easiest part, the difficulty was in rectifying your behaviours, stopping evil speech & actions.

**Q/ Does getting cupping done break the fast?**

**A/** There is a difference of opinion; Imām Ahmad, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn ul-Qayyim etc

all have the opinion that it breaks the fast and should not be done.

**Q/ Do inhalers break the fast for an asthmatic?**

**A/** No, inhalers are allowed, and that is the fatwa of multiple scholars, since it does not equate to constituting food or drink.

**Q/ Are ear & eye drops allowed?**

**A/** Ideally avoid using them when fasting, use them in the night, but if necessary they can be used and do not necessarily break the fast - but the risk is of experiencing their after-effect in the throat.

**Q/ Are nose drops allowed?**

**A/** No, because they can go directly down the throat from the nose.

**Q/ Is having a blood sample taken allowed?**

**A/** Yes, if it's just a small sample, but no if it's a large significant amount to be taken.

**Q/ Are injections allowed?**

**A/** Yes, but only if they have no nutritional value within them for the body.

**Q/ I ate forgetfully, is my fast broken for the day?**

**A/** No, you must stop eating immediately upon remembering, even remove anything you already had in your mouth and not swallow it, and continue for the day, it counts. Genuine forgetfulness does not break the fast.

**Q/ I vomited, is my fast broken?**

**A/** It depends on whether you did it on purpose or not....if you made yourself vomit by whatever means then your fast is broken, if however you were overcome by not feeling well, then it is not broken and you continue if you are well enough.

**Q/ Do I have to fast if I'm travelling?**

**A/** No, the Sunnah allows you to miss and make up the days. If you are healthy & strong and decide to fast anyway, that is allowed if you choose and you won't have anything to make up then.

**Q/ Does a very old person who is weak have to still fast?**

**A/** No, elderly who are too weak & frail to fast and no longer capable can miss and feed a poor person every day.

**Q/ What is the ruling on intercourse when fasting?**

**A/** It is not allowed and breaks the fast, the one who falls into that must expiate in the following order: firstly free a slave, if he's incapable, then he is allowed the second choice of fasting 2 months consecutively, if he's incapable, then he's allowed the third choice of feeding 60 poor people.

**Q/ If a person had intercourse overnight then woke up late near the end of Suhūr time, must he quickly make ghusl before fasting starts?**

**A/** No, he can have his Suhūr, and then make ghusl even after fasting starts as purification is not a condition.

**Q/ Is intimacy & touching allowed between the spouses?**

**A/** Those who are young should refrain from this as it can lead to matters that may break the fast. Those who can control the matter - typically those who are elderly - then there is lenience.

**Compilation & Translation: Abū Mu'ādh**

**Taqweem (@AbuMuadhTaqweem)**

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